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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child

Statement submitted by Anglican Consultative Council, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* E/CN.6/2007/1.

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Statement

The Anglican Communion and its Faith Perspective

We are 75 million Christians of 165 countries in the Anglican Communion, stretching from Northern Europe to Southern Africa, across the Middle East, Asia and South East Asia, and scattered throughout the Pacific to the Southern Cone and North America. More than half of our members are girls and women grieved by and acquainted with the harsh consequences girls and women face because of conflict, poverty, violence, discrimination and the unexpected traumas of natural disasters. This sisterhood of suffering is at the heart of our theology, and our commitment to transforming the whole world through peace, justice and rebuilding is central to our faith.

The worldwide Anglican Communion has adopted, as the basis of its work in proclaiming the Good News of God's realm, a commitment to teaching, baptizing and nurturing new believers; responding to people's needs through loving service; transforming unjust structures of society into instruments of peace and justice; striving to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustaining and renewing the life of the earth; and, living as one in our shared common mission.

The 51st Session of the UNCSW

We, the girls and women of the Anglican Communion, embrace unreservedly the theme for this year's United Nations Commission on the Status of Women:

The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child.

Gathering as delegates to the 51st Session of the UNCSW, we come from many varied communities in both the developing and the developed worlds, but we are compelled to speak with one voice of the absolute priority that Christ gave to the place of children. We regret the failure to provide communities which nurture girl children because of inadequacies of education, health and spiritual development. We abhor the damage done to girls by consequences of poverty, violence, trafficking and globalisation. We recognise the role of cultural oppression, undergirding so much of society, which limits the ability of girls to live rich and fulfilling lives.

Poverty and the unequal sharing of resources creates circumstances in which girls are vulnerable to violence, mistreatment and abuse. The absence of adequate economic development leads to girls being sold, trafficked, married at a young age or prostituted. Many girls around the world find themselves in such environments, where acts of violence against them is unopposed and unspoken. The pressure of poverty in families results in girls being sent to remote extended family situations as domestic slaves where they often are abused. In areas of economic development where there are large numbers of single men absent from their families, prostitution of young girls occurs all too frequently.

The reality of systemic male dominance found in many societies, cultures and religions gives validation to abuse, especially sexual abuse of girls. Child pornography has been enhanced by globalisation, making such material readily available and easily circulated throughout both developed and developing communities of the world. Despite a plethora of educative programs attempting to lessen the prevalence of domestic violence, our homes are still not safe places for girls. The practice of female genital mutilation continues unabated. The rape of girls as well as women persists wherever there are wars or conflict and is an ever-present threat to the so-called refugee camps for displaced

people. We believe such cultural attitudes are the great unspoken and unaddressed factor in the oppression of girls.

Educational opportunities for girls are adversely affected both by poverty and cultural attitudes. Girls throughout the world receive less education than boys irrespective of availability and affordability. Consequently girls become less employable, poorer and more susceptible to living in an environment of violence and seek escape through such evils as being trafficked. Similarly, lack of access to adequate health services through poverty and cultural attitudes also keeps girls in the cycles of disempowerment and violence. The communities in which they live then are poorer for not having the valuable gift of enhanced skills and abilities which educated, healthy girls would bring.

The Mission of Anglican Girls and Women

As Anglican girls and women drawn together from across the global village, our mission is to imitate Jesus Christ in giving the utmost priority to the welfare of girls, as well as boys, as we speak and act with confidence and compassion, participating in the creation of a world in which the lowly are raised up, the hungry are fed, the sick are healed, the innocent are protected and the oppressed are freed. Every girl child gives us a glimpse into the future. We are steadfast in our commitment to change the unacceptable picture where girls live in the margins of our societies uncertain of how safe they are to grow into the women God has created them to be.

We have heard from our Anglican sisters about the conditions of women and girls in their communities.

Where systems exist which cede power to men, women and girls are kept in virtual slavery, primarily borne of an inability to challenge their culture. Even where laws have been passed calling for empowerment, they have scant impact on women or girls when gender difference is not observed and their implementation is virtually nonexistent. The impact of globalisation has created economies of inequality, especially among women and girls, as jobs, wages and prices contribute to a divided society without hope of escape to a better life. The effects of war and armed conflict, the incidences of rape and murder, all are vivid examples of widespread acceptance of discrimination against women and girls. The low percentage of women in national decision-making roles contributes to an obsession with the violence of war and a resultant escape into consumerism. Where the media shapes a girl to think about herself only as the beautiful and stylish property of a man, she is prevented from forming for herself a culture of self-determination with concern for the welfare of the whole of society.

In every instance the role for the Church, and especially fits women's groups, is to advocate for access to education and training, to provide educational opportunities, to change the culture to one of inclusion of women and girls in decision-making roles, to work for a new and just society which takes care of its children, both girls and boys, as the heart of its future. This is happening across the global village of the Anglican Communion, albeit in relatively small doses, considering the enormity of the world's physical and psychological illnesses.

The Role of the Church

The question remaining for the religious community – and the Anglican Communion in particular – is how to translate the love of God into specific decisions and concrete actions for the well-being of the girl-child and how to organize events around her total well-being rather than dividing our concern into areas of health or education or violence. This notion of total well-being has to do with having the socially grounded capacity to make choices according to values. For the girl-child this means having the capacity and the freedom to achieve those things constitutive to her well-being, and it translates into empowering her, enabling her to live to her full of potential, becoming whole. For only then can she return to God all that she was created to be.

Our hope is that partnerships will be formed within our civil societies to develop projects, programs, policies and legislation of best practices which will specifically focus on the girl child's full participation in her community. Partnerships which include the girl-child will best ensure the success and integrity in this work as it reaches across cities, rural and remote areas in both the developing and developed nations. Our work and our voices are an enduring contribution to UNCSW, to our civil societies and to our churches. We are proud to represent our Church, we are privileged to be part of the UNCSW and we are humbled by the opportunity to gather with women of all faith and spiritual traditions. What we bring as women is our determination to continue to work and pray for a free and just society in every corner of our global village.